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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JAKARTA 013329

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SUBJECT: INTER-EMBASSY POLITICAL ISLAM CONTACT GROUP'S
INAUGURAL MEETING

Classified By: Political Officer Catherine E. Sweet, Reason 1.4(b)

11. (C) Summary. On November 9, representatives from the British, Canadian, Japanese, New Zealand, Dutch, Singaporean and U.S. embassies in Jakarta met to establish a political Islam contact group; representatives from the Australian and German embassies will participate in future meetings. Most countries are focused on education, with the UK having the most extensive outreach program. New Zealand is working on interfaith dialogue, which its representative admits has been useful for exchanging views but not for obtaining tangible results. The Dutch representative suggested that what is needed is intra-faith dialogue within the Muslim community, not interfaith dialogue. Singapore, given its complex relationship with Indonesia, does not run Muslim outreach programs here. This contact group will be a useful complement to our ongoing bilateral cooperation. We were struck, however, by how little is being done by other countries to reach out in a systematic way to the largest Muslim community in the world. End Summary.

12. (U) On November 9, representatives from the British, Canadian, Japanese, New Zealand, Dutch, Singaporean and U.S. embassies in Jakarta met to establish a political Islam contact group; representatives from the Australian and German embassies were unable to attend, but plan to participate in future meetings (the group has tentatively agreed to meet monthly). Organized by the U.K. mission, the working group includes officers who are primarily responsible for tracking and engaging Muslim groups. (Note. The Japanese Embassy sent a researcher affiliated with the embassy who did not have specific information about Japan's programs. End Note.) As part of the initial meeting, each representative spoke briefly about his/her government's Muslim outreach programs. Poloff provided an overview of the USG's strategy, including our various exchange opportunities (and notably past International Visitor programs), USAID's Islam and Civil Society program, and outreach by multiple Embassy sections to meet with a wide range of Muslim contacts. She noted that our efforts focus both on counterterrorism program, designed to counteract violent Islamist groups, and engagement programs intended to reach out to more moderate Muslim organizations.

U.K. Concentrating on Education

13. (SBU) The British representative said that education is a key component of their engagement with the Muslim community, particularly curriculum development. Working through the mass Muslim organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the British Council, the British are sending Islamic boarding school

(pesantren) leaders to the UK for a month of training in curriculum development, educational and financial management.

When they return, each trainee is expected to hold training seminars for ten additional pesantren. The British believe this program has been very successful in improving pesantren management, with administrators now monitoring what is being taught in their classrooms. It has been extended for another two years, and will double the number of pesantren who have received training from 500 to 1000. At the university level, the Foreign Office pays for a linkage program between the University of Leeds and Indonesian higher education institutions. The Embassy is also working with the State Islamic University (UIN) on a gender issues module that will be included in UIN's interdisciplinary MA program, UK faculty will teach the module. The British representative commented that UIN has been a good partner, with excellent networks and knowledge of where the limits of British involvement should be.

¶4. (SBU) Finally, the British are focusing on multiculturalism and Islam's place in the wider world. For example, they have produced a "Muslims in Britain" pamphlet that NU and Muhammadiyah are distributing to their pesantren, which includes images such as government ministers engaging with religious groups and a policewoman wearing a headscarf. (Note. This mimics our "Muslims in America" pamphlet. End Note.)

N.Z. Focused on Interfaith Dialogue, But Does it Work?

¶5. (SBU) The New Zealand DCM reported success in three areas. First, New Zealand is funding a teacher-training

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program run by the International Center for Islam Pluralism (ICIP), which promotes multiculturalism in conservative West Javanese pesantren. Second, the GONZ has purchased books written by Indonesian Islam experts that are designed to combat jihadism, distributing these to pesantren. Third, they have established a Muslim youth leaders program that will target more conservative and radical leaders for future engagement.

¶6. (C) The GONZ's focus, however, has been on promoting interfaith dialogue (IFD), in coordination with Australia, the Philippines and Indonesia; the next IFD will be held here in May. The New Zealand DCM admitted that he is struggling to find tangible deliverables that might come from the dialogue, saying that IFD has been useful as a "talk shop," but not much more. His government is interested in education and curriculum development, but he said that the Muslim community feels threatened by the concept of pluralism, which hinders Wellington's objectives. As a result, they are trying to find a different way to frame the promotion of pluralism so that it is less threatening (perhaps by working through community groups).

¶7. (C) He asked about whether other governments viewed IFD as useful. The Dutch representative pointedly commented that IFD cannot be the solution since the problem is intra-faith rather than inter-faith: there needs to be a dialogue within Islam rather than between Islam and other religions, he contended. To encourage intra-faith dialogue, he said, foreign embassies will need to use indigenous organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah. He also pointed out that more must be done to push the Government of Indonesia to deal with intra-faith conflicts, noting the GOI's failure to prevent attacks by Muslims on the Ahmadiyya sect.

Singapore: Political Islam Too Hot to Handle

¶8. (C) The Singaporean representative said Indonesian-Singaporean relations are "difficult" not only because of proximity, but because of Indonesia's perception

of Singapore as a "Chinese," non-Muslim country that is allied with the West (even though, he pointed out, 15 percent of Singaporeans are Muslim). Talking about Islam, he said, is "very hot and very hard," and the problems that other countries experience in engaging Islam are magnified ten times for Singapore. Consequently, Singapore does not run such programs in Indonesia. However, they do organize regular visits from the Singaporean Islamic Scholars Council (Majelis Ulama Islam Singapore) to Indonesia, and send Indonesians to Singapore for specific programs such as learning about "halal" food labeling.

¶9. (C) In Singapore itself, he noted, the government focuses on forming religious rehabilitation groups to reintegrate radicals. The program includes outreach by religious leaders as well as financial and social support to the radicals' families. He said that approximately ten have already been re-released back into society (although they are still monitored). He noted that Australia is exploring ways of doing something along the same lines, although he did not comment on whether the Indonesians were also interested.

¶10. (C) Finally, he spoke about Singapore's regional efforts to engage Islam by promoting an Asian-Middle East dialogue. He admitted, however, that the dialogue has foundered because Middle Eastern countries are suspicious of past attempts to include Israel. The Government of Singapore is now trying to assuage the Arabs' fears by promising to include the Palestinians and exclude Israel.

The Netherlands and Canada: Modest Programs

¶11. (SBU) The Dutch representative said his government focuses a good deal on education, but mainly from a poverty-reduction perspective. They will shortly be launching a \$100 million program with the ILO on this, which he said will be their largest bilateral program. On Islamic education, the Dutch have a scholarship program for Indonesians to study in Holland, and have a cooperative arrangement between UIN and Leiden University. The Dutch likewise run a "Knowledge of Islam" bilateral program administered by Utrecht and Leiden universities, with speaker programs on topics like the influence of Islam on Indonesian

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decentralization or the role of Islam within political parties. In general, he said, these are all small-scale programs.

¶12. (SBU) Like Holland and the U.K., Canada's approach is primarily education-focused (they also differentiate between counterterrorism programs and engaging political Islam). The Canadian representative said that Canada's McGill University has a long-standing relationship with Indonesian universities. Separately, the embassy has partnered with a small Muslim publication to promote moderation.

¶13. (C) She noted that the Government of Canada is trying to determine how best to reach the grassroots, given their limitations as a Western government. She suggested that like-minded governments should leverage the human rights and democracy angle to put a stop to creeping "sharia-ization," which disadvantages women and non-Muslims. She views Indonesia's membership on the UN Security Council and Human Rights Commission a key opportunity for obliging the GOI to behave in a democratic way that upholds human rights.

Atmospherics/Comment

¶14. (C) It was unfortunate that the Australians could not attend, because they are more engaged on this issue than many other Embassies; we look forward to their participation in future meetings. All the participants seemed grateful to have this opportunity to learn more about each other's

programs in a multilateral setting and should be a useful complement to our ongoing bilateral cooperation. What was most striking, however, was how little is being done by other countries to reach out in a systematic way to the largest Muslim community in the world.

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